

# Interview with Patricia Hill Collins<sup>1</sup>

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On October 29, 2019, a group of intellectuals met at the Sociology Department of USP, at the initiative of the *Tempo Social* editor, for an interview with Patricia Hill Collins, an internationally renowned American intellectual, who opened new perspectives for Black feminist thought, as a critical social theory. The departure point was Collins new book, entitled *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, where she explores the parallels between the challenges faced by those activists-intellectuals who coined the notion of intersectionality, and the new challenges faced today. During the conversation, other themes emerged, exploring the author's research agenda and her previous books, as well as the current challenges for the studies on racial relations and for the anti-racist militance.

1. Transcription: Louisa Acciari (PhD LSE/UK, Research Fellow and Co-director of the Centre for Gender and Disastre, University College London, UCL/UK). We acknowledge the support of different institutions that allowed the academic visit of Patricia Hill Collins to Brazil in October 2019: the University of São Paulo/Faculty of Philosophy, Languages and Social Sciences, the Federal University of São Carlos/ Department of Human Sciences and Education, anped – Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação, sof – Sempre Viva Organização Feminista, Ação Educativa, Cebrap – Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento and Boitempo Editorial.

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Helena Hirata: *According to your approach, intersectionality is at the same time a “knowledge project” and a “political weapon” (Collins, 2015; Collins & Bilge, 2020). Does it mean, as the French researcher Amélie Le Renard (2018, p. 180) stresses, that intersectional approach is a useful analytical tool only when it comes to studying subaltern people? Is intersectionality valuable only for oppressed and dominated groups, and not useful in order to study the dominant groups? For example, how can we approach the case of Black professors, who are at the same time dominant by their social position and suffer race oppression (side by side with sex oppression, in the case of female professors)?*

Patricia Hill Collins: It is important to acknowledge that the framework of intersectionality was initially advanced by Black women, Latinas, poor people, and members of similarly subordinated groups. But in no ways does that mean that this framework is limited to the study of marginalized individuals or oppressed groups. One reason that intersectionality can be threatening to elite groups is that it conceptualizes domination and subordination as interconnected. Privileges of race, class, gender and sexuality and marginalization via those same categories are not discrete entities but reflect intersecting power relations where my privilege is intimately connected to your disadvantage and vice versa. Because this relational framework is intersectional, there is no place to hide. There is no such thing as a purely racial analysis or a purely gendered one. Instead, we are all situated within a web of relationships that simultaneously privilege and penalize us based on our social location.

Asking whether intersectionality speaks primarily or solely from the experiences of women of color, Black people, sexual minorities, poor people, young people and politically disenfranchised is part of a longstanding perspective that either see such knowledge as particularistic and not universal, or that sees such knowledge as useful only when it speaks to pre-existing elite concerns. This framework views the cultures and experiences of these groups as useful primarily when they provide data for theories advanced by elite groups or if the theories that they do advance can be contained to the particularities of subordination. Both assumptions leave domination and privilege undertheorized as well as the power hierarchies that uphold Western knowledge itself.

As I argue in *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory (IACST)* (Collins 2019), intersectionality is not a field that aims to explain or sustain the social order but rather aims to criticize and change that order because racism, sexism and the like are fundamentally unjust. By claiming knowledge about but also produced by people on the bottom, intersectionality examines how particular experiences and the points of view that they engender provide multiple pathways to approach universal questions of equality and social justice. Obviously, not everyone has a vested interest in

changing the status quo. Questions as to whether intersectional analysis applies to privileged groups fundamentally asks intersectionality to prove itself by the very epistemological standards that catalysed it and that intersectionality sets out to criticize and dismantle. Perfectly reasonable scholars who are willing to stray from their areas of expertise to study difficult questions – for example, all the people who are devoted to analysing the works of a long-departed Shakespeare – seem incapable of making the effort to read the works of scholars who have contributed to intersectionality. Because they already believe that the works of Shakespeare are worthwhile, they struggle with the arcane language of Shakespeare’s English and take his ideas seriously. In contrast, the difficult questions that intersectionality raises for privileged scholars are often met with the response that such work is too difficult, too easy, or not worth the effort to try.

In chapter 4, “Intersectionality and epistemic resistance” (*LACST*, Collins 2019), I examine how intersectionality encourages us to challenge the existing power hierarchies that shape our very ability to do intellectual work. We can start with the multi-textured, particular experiences of a wide array of groups to analyse a common theme through a heterogenous lens. For example, individual identity for people using intersectional frameworks provides a starting place for analysis. But because intersectionality is always in motion, we all must move beyond the particulars of our own individual lives. Rather than drilling down into how the experiences of Black faculty with multiple identity categories might look (this question has been taken up by the group), I’d like to see new and similar questions: How can we approach the case of white male professors, who are at the same time dominant by their social position, yet who garner racial privilege? This question quickly identifies the multiple ways that white masculinity is structured across the same categories e.g., the gay white male professor, the upwardly mobile white male professor who remembers what it was like to be poor, the white male professor who suffered sexual assault as a boy, or the white male professor who remains haunted by his mother’s rape.

Intersectionality raises complex questions such as these, not as a banner to defend a retrograde identity politics (e.g., the troubling case of far-Right populism’s embrace of a romanticized identity politics of white masculinity), but rather as a way forward to examine the interconnected lives that we are actually living. Intersectionality points to the heterogeneity within any seemingly universal category. To me intersectionality as a field of inquiry and praxis needs to broaden its interpretive community, not by having subordinated groups carrying a begging bowl to prove themselves to more powerful social actors, but rather by building interpretive communities across differences in power. Whether intersectionality can successfully do this remains to be seen.

Maria Carla Corrochano: *As appears in many of your papers, the concept of intersectionality encompasses other inequalities than sex, race, and class. Could you tell us about the importance and the ways to include categories as age and generation into the intersectional analysis, especially considering the present context, clearly marked by relevant differences among generations?*

Patricia Hill Collins: I love this question because it speaks to my current project, namely, of how age as a category of analysis might help explain how and why young people resist oppression. *Black Feminist Thought* (BFT, Collins, [1990] 2000) is an extended analysis of Black women's resistant knowledge. More recently, I expand this argument in *LACST*'s chapter 3, "Intersectionality and resistant knowledge projects" (Collins, 2019). Currently, I am interested in how experiences that young people have at a crucial time in their lives shape their political consciousness. I am grounding my analysis in the lives of young Black people in the US and drawing upon intersectionality as an interpretive framework, with age as a central category of analysis. If anti-Black racism continues to take forms that are specific for Black youth, why would we assume that young Black men and women are unaware of the forms of racism targeted toward them? Why would we assume that young Black men and young Black women lack the capacity to understand and resist their own oppression?

I think that a strong case can be made that generational analysis plays an important part in shaping the political consciousness of young people (Mannheim, [1927/28] 1952). Conceptualizing age as a category of analysis, as opposed to defining age as a descriptive category for statistical purposes, points toward the utility of generational analysis as a way of thinking about age. How might age be an important category of analysis for intersectionality, and why it might be especially important now. Is age a system of power? And if it is a system of power, what kind of system of power is it? Grounding my work in the needs of a specific social group, in this case, Black youth in the US, highlights the significance for thinking more expansively about age and its relationship to intersectionality.

In this regard, distinctive generations of African American youth entered young adulthood during periods of political upheaval and those of seeming political quiescence. What are the political implications of living through a common set of political experiences when you are 10 years old, or 20 years old, or 50 years old? Take, for example, the massive changes of the past several years and their effects on us all: in the US, we're living through the effects of an eight-year Obama Presidency dedicated to inclusivity followed by four years by the subsequent president to undo Obama administration policies; a global health pandemic that has laid bare stark

racial inequalities within health; and the staying power and increasingly global contours of the “Black Lives Matter” movement as a response to social injustice. How have these events affected Black children, young adults, middle-aged people, and the Black elderly? A mono-categorical lens reduces complexity that elevates race as a master category of analysis. But what about age?

You raise the important question of how Black youth are situated within intergenerational Black activism. Intergenerational relationships among Black people in the US provide a rich terrain for examining political consciousness both *within* and *among* generations. I think that young Black people have long faced similar challenges that have taken different forms but that have remained constant over time. Differential policing of Black youth and the lack of concern for the lives of Black youth are not new issues. Far from it. Different generations experience that differently depending on where they are young, and young are targeted for these types of behaviors. What is the intergenerational wisdom or intergenerational knowledge for resisting such treatment? How is that knowledge shared, passed on and revitalized with each subsequent generation? I am currently grounding my focus on generational consciousness in the experiences of Black youth, being mindful to conceptualize Black youth through an intersectional framework. But I am especially interested in a broader set of issues around politics of generational consciousness that speak to the institutional mechanisms that different generations use to talk to one another about common issues.

Flavia Matheus Rios: *In the Preface you wrote for the Brazilian edition of your book Black feminist thought published by Boitempo (Collins, 2019a), you assumed that although your reflections were anchored solely on the experience of Black American women, the ideas contained therein could go beyond national. How is this possible? Do you think Black women from the North and the South of the Americas could share values and experiences?*

Patricia Hill Collins: I think that Black women in the North and in the South already share more than we know. What we need are dialogues across the national boundaries that separate us. When I wrote the first edition of *BFT* (Collins, [1990] 2000), I sensed that it was one partial perspective among many about what Black feminist thought was and could be. Even the term “Black feminist thought” was provisional, because I knew that you cannot settle on unified knowledge without a democratic, inclusive process of who gets to decide what counts as legitimated knowledge. I saw writing *BFT* as an epistemological challenge – its knowledge would be provisional until the interpretive community was expanded. A global

Black women's community is not just something to be discovered – rather such communities need to be constructed.

The current question is how to construct Black women's communities across national borders who engage in this collective project. The challenges that I faced in developing my understanding of Black women's experiences and ideas throughout the African Diaspora were particular to me but have general implications. When it came to learning about Black feminism in Brazil, the process was especially challenging. Because I could not read Portuguese, I had to rely on secondary sources about Black people in Brazil as well translations of primary sources that were written by Afro-Brazilian women. The gatekeeping was immense. So, I had to work around multiple gatekeeping practices that frame how we are encouraged to see one another across national settings.

I now have a more sophisticated understanding of media and academic gatekeeping practices in the US and in Brazil. Both say, *"because we control what counts as truth, here are our perceptions of Brazil that you must accept"*. When it comes to American media, American-centric coverage of all global events is paramount. Despite its size and global importance, the coverage of Brazil is uneven and skews toward topics of interest to elites. Historically, the academy has taken a similar track. Take, for example, the longevity of depictions of Brazil as racial democracy within race scholarship. Either Brazil has no race problem because it has no race, but only a national identity, or Brazil's elimination of racism through its racial democracy is a situation to be emulated by the US. Media and academic perceptions reinforce one another. For example, depictions of Carnival in Brazil routinely highlight it as a festival that celebrates Brazil's racial harmony. I questioned these gatekeeping practices because I had long suspected there was far more to Brazil and Black women in Brazil than scantily clad samba dancers. Travelling to Brazil, despite my Portuguese deficiencies, was one way that I could get other points of view. I cite my own difficulties because I had the time and resources to try. Many Black women throughout the Diaspora do not.

There is broad, young, vibrant energy among Black women in Brazil who are working for change in so many different locations. I have met numerous young Black Brazilian women intellectuals who are doing cutting-edge work, many under difficult situations. And their experiences were familiar to me. To me, the moment seems to be right to continue developing conversations across national borders among Black women in the North and in the South.

To clarify, when I wrote *Black feminist thought*, I never thought that the perspectives that I presented about US Black women were true for all Black women. I was well-aware of the bias in American media and in the US academy about Black women



in the African Diaspora but took a leap of faith in writing a book that others might find to be useful. And that is exactly what has happened. *BFT* is starting place for a discussion, and I welcome conversations that speak to the particularities of Black women's experiences within Brazil, South Africa, the UK and Canada, but that also strive to transcend national boundaries. I offer the ideas in *BFT* to the next generation of Black feminist intellectuals. They may choose to embrace the vocabulary and deepen its meaning. Or perhaps criticize it or change it. Regardless, it is there for them.

Edna Roland: *In your milestone book Black Feminist Thought, finally translated into Portuguese, you tell us how in the USA a thorough work of searching and collecting ideas and texts of African-American women has been done in order to question the negative images of Black womanhood and to reveal the rich Black women's intellectual tradition. In Brazil there is much still to be done regarding a similar search. However, we do rely on a rich African epistemology that came to us through the various religious traditions from West Africa, that offers us positive and strong feminine archetypes that take distance from the binary logic of good and bad indoctrinated by the Christian tradition. I wonder how much elements of the African epistemology have survived and been reshaped in the Black feminism developed in the USA.*

Patricia Hill Collins: I think there are more African retentions among African American women than we realize. Ironically, meeting Black women outside the US context sharpened my understanding of those retentions. It was as if Brazil, South Africa, Cuba, and Haiti held up a mirror to African American women to see African retentions. It is one thing to imagine those ties; it is another feel the connections. That is my short answer.

But making this case about how the ideas from a rich African epistemology permeate African American religious traditions has been a challenging intellectual project within the secular assumptions of the academy. Black women's behavior reflects the positive and strong feminine archetypes that you describe, but ironically, the hard work of excavating those African influences remains unfinished within Black feminism in the US. My sense is that investigating the richness and political significance of this cultural inheritance has been far more difficult in the US than in Brazil. Even though the African past is something that we all must imagine, those of us in the US and Brazil may imagine it quite differently through the distinctive national frameworks of our respective countries.

My initial use of the term *Afrocentrism* in the 1990 edition of *Black Feminist Thought* invoked this framework of how enslaved African people in the US drew

upon African epistemologies (Collins, [1990] 2000). My more contentious claim was the way in which these ideas were remade in the context of racial oppression was essential to Black survival. Yet that argument was difficult to get published within mainstream scholarship. Prior to writing *BFT*, I submitted an article to a prominent feminist journal where I argued that African American families and Black women's understanding of motherhood within them were a reaction to racism, but that African retentions of conceptions of Black womanhood might also be at work. My argument rested on the claim that Black women expressed agency that potentially demonstrated the importance of African epistemologies for surviving racism. I used the term "Afrocentric" to describe this line of thought. My paper was rejected. One reviewer suggested, to paraphrase, "*we are not convinced that there is such a thing as Afrocentrism. We don't believe African philosophical traditions exist, and if such traditions do exist, the author would need to prove to us that there were African continuities in the New World*". How was I prove that, given that Western religions, and popular culture all advanced the claim of Black inferiority? The reviewer had no problem arguing that contemporary Western society was connected somehow to an imagined Greece, skipping conveniently over 1500 years of European history, but wouldn't even entertain the thought that such ties could be accurate for a much shorter period of time (500 years). I could not win by submitting journal articles that argued this case. Instead, I decided to write books. The "Afrocentric feminist" worldview in *BFT* (1990) was the result.

We need serious study of how African epistemologies have informed continental African societies as well as the wide variations within Black Diasporic experiences. My sense is that Brazil has rich ties to this past through the legacies of Candomblé and quilombos, whereas the US has similar sensibilities but far less understanding of the significance of African ideas to our lived experiences. We do not know the names of anonymous African American women in the communities who were central to the construction and continuation of Black communities. There are good reasons for these differences. African American women have also had strong Black women archetypes that refute mainstream Western gender ideologies. Yet this archetype of the strong Black woman is the very one that has been attacked and stereotyped because it is powerful. When it comes to resisting oppression, having access to alternative ideas is vital. For African Americans, and for Black women who wish to deepen Black feminism, looking outside prevailing Western intellectual frameworks is essential.

Marcos Nobre: *My questions relate to your most recent book, Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory, and more specifically to intersectionality's horizon as a theory*



*in the making and in its relation to other critical perspectives oriented by and to praxis (i.e., the theoretical status of intersectionality as critical social theory and its reach). In chapter 2 of the book you discuss theories that have some resemblance to your own in the sense that they are oriented by and to praxis...*

Patricia Hill Collins: Not all of them!

Marcos Nobre: *Not all of them, you are right, I was just trying to introduce a question on the relation of your theory to those of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt school.*

Patricia Hill Collins: Actually, the Frankfurt School rightfully claims the term “Critical Theory” and does incorporate praxis into their framework. My point is that attention to praxis also reappears across other mainstream traditions, for example, British Cultural Studies as well as in resistant knowledge traditions such as critical race theory, Black and Latina feminism, and decolonial studies. “Praxis” is one of those terms we need to unpack. My selection of critical theories was deliberate and spoke to this very point.

Marcos Nobre: *Different uses of critique, if I understand you correctly...*

Patricia Hill Collins: Yes.

Marcos Nobre: *At the same time, it seems to me that your proposal of intersectionality as a critical social theory aims at bringing together various uses of social critique. You also insist that it must be a critical social theory that is under construction, that is a theory in the making. My question is then: how would the core of such project look like if not a theoretical and practical space that could potentially embrace various critical practices in one single construction? This is another way of asking you about the reach of intersectionality. Would you say for instance that it would be like a common language for interdisciplinary collaboration, and in this sense, would it be comparable to the role played by the critique of political economy in Marxism?*

Patricia Hill Collins: When you suggest that intersectionality may be searching for a common language for interdisciplinary collaboration, I think you put your finger on one core aspiration of intersectionality. Relationality lies at the heart of intersectionality and of *LACST*. Intersectionality is broader than academic disciplines, because not all knowledge projects organize themselves in this way. In the book, I aimed to address the question “what is intersectionality?”. As an individual, I could

imagine what intersectionality is and might be, and that the solitary scholar model was certainly appealing at many points in my writing process. But I chose to map the field by examining how people used intersectionality. To hold up a mirror to the heterogeneous ideas and practices that accompany intersectionality, trying to map the varying ways people are using it.

The answer unfolded as I wrote. When I began, I thought of critical social theory more as finished system of ideas. There were some comforting moments when I could see the contours of my concepts and how they hung together. For example, when, in chapter 1, I finally was able to distinguish intersectionality's core concepts from its guiding principles, I envisioned it as a thing. To me, it was a critical social theory much like the Marxist critique of political economy, a philosophy where the relationship among ideas was the true test of the validity of the theory. There was no need to empirically verify intersectionality because it was not designed to predict anything. But the process of writing the book made this premature closure problematic. Over time, my growing sense of the distinctions between critical social *theory* and critical social *theorizing* emerged. My initial questions became more complex – “How do people who claim intersectionality understand it? How do these understandings shape their praxis? And how does this praxis shape understandings of intersectionality?”. It seemed that I was moving much closer to intersectionality as a *process* for doing critical work. Or as a methodology.

I entered this project with a social science understanding of methodology as a way of testing theoretical hypotheses. Yet my view of the relationship between theory and method changed dramatically over the course of the project. One pivotal moment occurred in New Zealand where I was speaking at a Cultural Studies Conference on capitalism. My host casually said to me: “... intersectionality, a theory? I thought it was a methodology”. It had never occurred to me that someone would be thinking about intersectionality so differently than me. I had a long flight back to the US to consider the implications of that seemingly small conversation. Did this mean that intersectionality as critical social theory emerged via its methodology, the process of doing intersectional work? If so, how might I conceptualize intersectionality as a process, an open-ended methodology that catalyzes a similarly open-ended critical social theory? How do you theorize knowing what the end looks like? Or even if there is an end? How do you know that you are doing a better job at developing intersectionality by how you are doing it? These core questions lie at the heart of intersectionality itself.

At this point, for me, praxis lies at the heart of critical discourse, or a critical view of the world, that is grounded in and responsive to a critical methodological praxis. Because intersectionality's content examines the connections among these systems

of power, its methodology or praxis must also attend to the power relations that produce its own knowledge. Theorizing about intersecting power relations requires developing new power relations within our methodologies to do so. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's framework for decolonizing methodology develops the kind of intellectual and political praxis needed for intersectionality (Smith, 1999).

Nadya Araujo Guimarães: *Perhaps we can change the sequence since it goes easy from Marcos' to my point, because I was also thinking about your most recent book, sorry!*

Patricia Hill Collins: Don't be sorry! I am honored that you are reading *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, I really am. I received my copy of the book only two months ago and thought it was going to take much longer for it to circulate. Imagine my surprise when I arrived in Brazil and found people waiting for me with questions. I clearly underestimated the global reach of Kindle. Thus far, people in Israel, the UK, Spain, and other non-US countries have contacted me, sharing ideas about the book. This book was a labor of love. It took me years to conceptualize, research and write. It is very gratifying to know that people are reading it. Thank you!

Nadya Araujo Guimarães: *In the very beginning of the book your argument conducts the reader from the idea of intersectionality as a metaphor, (and then) as a research tool, (and then) as a paradigm. At first glance it looks as if there was a cumulative reason, since the approach becomes deeper, and (step by step) more profound. But soon we realize that it is not exactly like this. The metaphor entails a more profound reasoning, since it anticipates the heuristic value of the concept; and the paradigm is not a result, it's open-ended. Thus, my question is: you explore a threefold perspective on intersectionality – as a metaphor, as a heuristic, and as a paradigm. How those perspectives interrelate?*

Patricia Hill Collins: The first chapter is typically one of the hardest to write for any book and *LACST* was no exception. I appreciate your question because it acknowledges one of the epistemological risks that I took in this book, in this instance, to avoid framing intersectionality through a historical narrative of progress where we assume that current expressions of intersectionality are more advanced and therefore better than prior ones. Narrative traditions of storytelling often follow a seemingly meandering path, where the storyteller is pressured to "get to the point". Often frowned upon as circular reasoning, recursive arguments that cross through and double back through a common point, while not linear, may deepen an argument. Fortunately, I realized early on in writing *LACST* that I had to adhere to the linear conventions of Western social theory in writing *LACST* (but not in conceptualizing

its arguments) in order to ensure that the book would be recognized as theory. But I also followed a different process in presenting the book's analysis that modelled and did not contradict the books' main arguments. Basically, this tension of putting a recursive, evolving argument in a linear box strengthened the substance of its arguments.

In chapter 1, the connections among using intersectionality as a metaphor, heuristic device and as a paradigm are not linear. By treating relationality within intersectionality as additive, articulated and co-forming, I use a similar strategy in chapter 7. Both chapters implicitly upend the linear thinking that has been central to Western notions of progress that saturate Western social theory. Because they do not assume dominance, conceptualizing intersectionality as a metaphor, a heuristic device and as a paradigm, and conceptualizing relationality within intersectionality as additive, articulated and co-forming, provide a vocabulary for an inclusive conversation among social actors. Linear models exclude people – recursive models include. Both chapters resist efforts to use a theory/application binary that privileges seemingly more theoretical intersectional projects over more practical ones. For example, some writers contend that early intersectionality was additive, something that was corrected when intersectionality defined itself as inherently co-forming. If you read chapter 7 carefully, I reject that thesis that intersectionality is grounded in relations of co-formation simply because powerful social actors say it is. Instead, I support the idea that a wide array of social actors – Black women, poor white women, Latino, and queer people – working on intersectionality as a complex project from their social locations as intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation “own” intersectionality.

Grounding intersectionality in a more participatory and democratic way of producing knowledge promises to enrich the field. When more people participate in an interpretive community, the questions are better, the interpretations are more incisive, and the reach into disparate interpretive and political communities is more expansive. This participatory process is especially important for intersectionality. Why would we use the same practices to produce intersectionality as a more effective social theory for maintaining social order? This endpoint is contradictory to its spirit. My goal was to provide a provisional common vocabulary (which people could then fight over) to ground conversations that would foster complexity within intersectionality. Traditional social theory, no matter how critical, rarely proceeds in this way.

Antonio Sergio Alfredo Guimarães: *My question has to do with anti-racist politics. You suggest that after WWII in Europe, scientific racism as mainstream science fell out*

*offavor in academia. And even today most people do not accept that “race” was part of modernization and modernity. In many ways, they conceive anti-racism as a denial of race. They ignore the African American tradition that since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century reconstructs race in a much more positive way, as self-identity. This is the core of “critical race theory”, but people in Germany or France didn’t feel comfortable with critical race theory. Even today, most people, feminists for example, react better to intersectionality than to critical race theory. My question is, can intersectionality erect bridges between these different anti-racist traditions in Europe and America?*

Patricia Hill Collins: When it comes to intersectionality and the politics of anti-racism, again, I find that focusing on a specific group of people and the challenges they face grounds critical racial analysis in important ways. If I grounded my analyses in the experiences of undocumented Latino/as in the US, I would deepen one lens on anti-racism and its connections to intersectionality. Wealthy Brazilians living in São Paulo might have a different angle of vision on these issues. For me, situating my work in African American political activism in response to anti-Black racism has been invaluable.

As I discuss in “Social blackness, honorary whiteness, and all points in between: color-blind racism as a system of power” (Collins, 2009, pp. 40-81), race and blackness are not the same thing. Black is a political category that may have been created in conjunction with slavery, colonialism, and Western discourse about the two, but it now has a life of its own. The revalorization of the term *Black* through Black consciousness movements in the US, South Africa, and Brazil among others, reclaims blackness as a political category (as opposed to a biological or cultural phenomenon), and valorizes Black identity as a *political* identity. The growing support for the Black Lives Matter movement among African Americans, especially Black youth, rests on a longstanding strategy of unapologetically claiming Blackness. This is neither a fleeting strategic political protest nor an identity moment that aims to restore self-esteem to a damaged Black psyche. It is fundamentally a political struggle that aims for racial justice.

When compared to the politics of anti-racism advanced by Black people, intersectionality can be simultaneously complicit with and rejecting of how racism has been organized, upheld, and resisted. Racism within different national traditions have their own patterns of anti-racism. Post-World War II traditions in Germany and in France, for example, both deny the reality of “race” but do so in response to their distinctive historical contexts. The national defeat and subsequent global censure of Germany’s racial policies during World War II ushered in a rejection of all things racial. This rejection in and of itself signaled Germany’s break with its racial past of

anti-Semitism and eugenics. In contrast, France never acknowledged the existence of “race” or racism in its colonies or within its national borders, instead choosing to deflect racism through a national identity of being “French”. The existence of racism and its centrality to colonialism were papered over in discourse where, because “race” was not real, neither was “racism”. The US followed a different path. Evidence for the reality of racism within US politics is widespread. Yet one outcome of the civil rights movement, and its seeming endpoint with the election of Barack Obama, was to convince the American public that racism was thing of the past. This deflection facilitated the emergence of a color-blind racism where, like its European counterparts, to speak of race was to cultivate racism.

Where does intersectionality fit into anti-racist discourse? On the one hand, intersectionality offers a big tent umbrella for a range of social justice projects, including anti-racism. On the other hand, definitions of race and racism within intersectionality can ironically weaken anti-racist politics. Because the term *race* circulates widely within intersectionality’s mantra “race, class and gender”, many people assume that if they use intersectionality, they are inherently advancing anti-racist politics. The term race may be mentioned within intersectional projects, yet a commitment to analyzing racism through intersectional lenses and to anti-racism as an important strategy can be minimized. Paying lip service to race within intersectionality may make race and racism more palatable for intersectionality’s practitioners, but it also sabotages the critical potential of a politics of anti-racism. That has been one of the criticisms of intersectionality, namely, that it provides a soothing replacement for more hard-hitting work on racism and anti-racism because so many other axes of power vie for attention.

But looking for anti-racism politics solely within the borders of intersectionality may be a failing strategy. Again, theorizing from the experiences of what people do may be helpful in pushing intersectionality forward. Participants in the Black Lives Matter movement and their allies who unapologetically claim the full humanity of Black people are raising new questions that foster a new politics of anti-racism (see e.g., Ransby, 2018). This generation has had access to critical race theory honed within the realities of African American intellectual traditions as well as a Black feminism that has been central to intersectionality’s development. This emerging sense of political Blackness, especially in response to the resurgence of a far-Right white identity politics, is informed by intersectionality. Understandably, Black women are quite central to this anti-racism that refuses to relinquish a focus on Blackness that is now understood through the lens of intersectionality. In their construction of blackness, Black women are not interested in reinstalling past anti-racist strategies where Black men become the face of Blackness or Black politics. This social



movement also advances a view of community as one grounded in participatory democracy, another ongoing theme of intersectional engagement. My sense is that many social movements where young people are prominently featured demonstrate some sort of engagement with intersectionality. The Black Lives Matter movement is not the endpoint but rather an entry point into an anti-racist politics that tests intersectionality by using it.

Alexandre Massella: *In your point of view, how can we carry out the academic debate on feminist epistemology among philosophers, since they seem resistant (prejudiced?) in accepting the contributions of this approach? Has academia developed a concept of knowledge, which comes from Black feminist thought?*

Patricia Hill Collins: I honestly do not know how widely Black feminist thought is read within mainstream philosophy. That is not my battle to fight and a new generation of Black and Latina philosophers are leading the way on this issue (Davidson, Gines & Marciano, 2010). But in considering how people might receive my intellectual work, I adhere to Frederick Douglass's observation that "power concedes nothing without a demand". Born into slavery, Douglass worked tirelessly for the abolition of slavery and then for citizenship rights for African American men and women. There are so many archetypes within Black politics of women and men who fought for changes that they never got to experience in their own lifetimes. Change rarely comes about solely through well-argued ideas within philosophical debates. The long arc of history toward social justice is rarely linear.

That said, there is much at stake in demanding change within Western philosophy, especially analytical philosophy. Philosophy lies at the heart of Western knowledge projects and change in the heart of Western knowledge ripples out throughout its disciplines. When feminist philosophers criticized philosophy from within the field, the effects of their efforts rippled out across the gender scholarship of multiple disciplines. My own work greatly benefited from the trailblazing work of Sandra Harding (1991), Iris Young (1990) and similar feminist philosophers who challenged epistemological frameworks that upheld patriarchy. They challenged the seeming universality of Western knowledge, pointing out how it made sense within assumptions of heteronormativity. They criticized how the very fundamentals of Western knowledge were not devoid of politics, but implicitly legitimated colonialism and imperialism. The issue was not to include Black feminist thought into pre-existing truths, but to broaden the terms of how truth is determined.

I build on these traditions in "Intersectionality and the question of freedom" (LACST, chapter 5) through a close reading of the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1948

[1977] and 1949 [2011]), a premier feminist philosopher whose work is being rediscovered by a new generation of philosophers. I respect Beauvoir's work and tried to provide a thorough and careful read of how her arguments about gender, along with race, class, sexuality, age, and ethnicity, shaped her analysis of freedom. I juxtapose Beauvoir's analyses with that of Pauli Murray (1987), a relatively unknown African American intellectual who engaged these same core categories of intersectionality, but who advanced quite different views about freedom (Bell-Scott, 2016). My goal was not to criticize Beauvoir to make room for my own arguments, but rather to engage her ideas as a way of pushing my own.

To return to your question, time may be better spent making the case for Black feminism by continuing ongoing dialogues among people who seek it out, than by trying to convince recalcitrant philosophers who remain lukewarm to its ideas. Institutional change takes time, but people who have marginalized within Western institutions will not wait forever. If power is not shared with those on the bottom, demands for change will persist. The concessions that may come in response to the demands of Black feminism and similar resistant knowledge projects remains to be seen.

Marcia Lima: *Both countries, the US and Brazil, have faced substantial violence against Black people, especially against Black men. I am trying to do an exercise using your powerful concept of 'controlling image', especially when we talk about social institutions that reproduce these images. I have two questions considering this. First, do you think this concept fits to understand the Black men's situation (dehumanization, objectification, and stereotypes about their violent behavior)? Second, do you consider the absence of a stronger debate on gender as relevant to think about Black men's situation, make that image more efficient especially in the case of violence. Do the Black intellectual men take a position as Black man? We do not talk about their gender...*

Patricia Hill Collins: I have examined this notion of controlling images in various places in my scholarship (see, e.g., Collins, 2018), including its application to Black masculinity. The idea of controlling images does apply to Black men. For example, *Black Sexual Politics* includes two chapters on gender and sexuality, one on Black masculinity and the other on Black femininity (Collins, 2004). Both chapters draw from this framework of controlling images to argue that the specific controlling images for each group underpin a Black gender ideology that differently subordinates Black men and Black women. Stated differently, the manipulation of gender and sexuality has been and remains fundamental to how racism is organized and operates. The controlling image of the strong black woman is tied to its counterpart,

the controlling image of the weak black man. These twinned controlling images permeate scholarship and public policy alike.

Your second question speaks to the centrality of violence within controlling images of both Black men and Black women. Violence has been central to the controlling images of black masculinity, one that emerges in the US context after slavery as the ‘violent black beast’ that could no longer be domesticated because he was no longer enslaved. This longstanding trope of Black men as inherently violent persists as a rationale for denying Black men citizenship rights and basic human respect. But when it comes to violence, how exactly do these images “control” Black men? How do controlling images of Black masculinity shape Black men’s understanding of the violence that they experience by state actors, that they target toward one another, and that they inflict on the girls and women in their lives?

Fundamentally, these and other controlling images work to mask forms of systemic violence that characterize intersecting power relations (Collins, 2018). It may be challenging to see how controlling images can be applied to an intersectional array of social identities, yet violence provides a window in a broader understanding of how controlling images are fundamental to power relations. For example, the controlling images that characterize heterosexual white masculinity, especially among middle-class white men, are uniformly positive. Yet this group is disproportionately responsible for forms of systemic violence that affect so many other groups. What role do controlling images play in incorporating white boys into their assigned places as white men? This is an important area of analysis. What kind of analysis do we get when Black men aim to fix the problems in Black communities by becoming more like white men?

Black women have long seen how the controlling images of Black femininity that reflect intersections of gender, race and sexuality have a powerful negative effect on Black women’s lives. But many discussions of gender-based violence against Black women either target broader social practices, for example, a rape culture whereby white men sexually assaulted Black women without impunity; or they downplay violence enabled by their domestic partners, sons, ministers and community members. The controlling image of the strong Black woman counsels Black women to overlook violence at the hands of Black men, all in the name of protecting them from racism. But is this enough? Or does this avoid the difficult question of how addressing violence requires examining how all parties deploy and are harmed by controlling images.

Helena Hirata: *Arlie Hochschild adjudicate to material causes the success of her concept of “emotional work” (Hochschild, 2017, p. 8). According to Hochschild, “the real cause*

*of its success” relates to the “huge development” of the service sector. Is it possible to find a similar type of explanation for the success of the concept of “intersectionality”? In your point of view, what explains the large acceptance of this concept both in academy and in social movements?*

Patricia Hill Collins: Arlie Hochschild’s analysis of emotional labor certainly influenced my work on service work as a site of intersecting power relations. The experiences of Black domestic workers working in private homes exemplify how white employers annexed the emotional labor of their employees. Despite claims that Black women were like “one of the family”, or perhaps because of it, Black women were routinely underpaid and exposed to sexual assault for the carework they performed in white homes. The controlling image of the smiling Mammy who always cares for her white children as if they were her own obscures how her Black children may be neglected because their mother must work. The mark of good service is the performance of care, namely, or performing emotions that convince her or his superior that s/he really loves them. But the emotional labor of carework also has a resistant streak built into it – the smile that disappears from the waitress’ face when a diner leaves a tiny tip, or the stories that Black domestic workers tell each other about their employers when they sit down in their own kitchens.

Hochschild’s study was ground-breaking because it situated emotional labor in the context of the burgeoning service sector. Her analysis of how flight attendants were trained identified how important performing convincing carework was to the service sector’s growth and profitability. This idea of emotional labor potentially travels well into colleges and universities because, as part of the service sector, as professors and graduate teaching assistants are increasingly expected to provide convincing performances of institutional carework. In this context, emotional labor takes on a special status, a point often noted by the women and people of color who do a disproportionate share of academic carework. What are the costs to those who perform emotional labor and who are routinely underpaid for performing it, to those who do that work? Within a capitalist exchange relationship, emotional labor and carework become commodities.

I find your question of how these ideas about emotional labor in the academy might help explain the ways in which intersectionality has been incorporated into the academy intriguing. Intersectionality is certainly noticed, talked about, and acknowledged. But whether this acknowledgement signals genuine acceptance is an entirely different issue. Is intersectionality’s seeming acceptance within neoliberal frameworks of academia due, in part, to its perceived value as carework within such institutions? In what ways, if any, might these invisible norms of carework influence

how discourses are received and circulated? Specifically, is intersectionality perceived to be a friendlier, more caring, and thereby less threatening critical project than seemingly more confrontational social theories such as feminism, critical race theory and Marxist social theory? Within the seemingly apolitical social theories in the academy, is intersectionality functioning as proxy for a more palatable multicultural discourse on difference?

Intersectionality might be the right discourse for the right time for the wrong reasons. Intersectionality has been incorporated, but on whose terms and toward what ends? It is important not to confuse visibility with acceptance. A short list of people may be associated with intersectionality, but how much have the ideas of the discourse been taken up by specialists within the fields of study as well as teachers and researchers across any given institution? My sense is that intersectionality is far less accepted in the academy than we think. Intersectionality may be visible in ways that are useful to the academy. Because it provides a big tent of inclusion whereby universities need not change in any substantive way, incorporating intersectionality helps institutional performances of carework.

When it comes to meeting universities' needs for emotional labor, intersectionality has been increasingly taken up by service sectors within universities, for example, student services, faculty recruitment, and the like. But *how* it has been taken up speaks to the theme of emotional labor. Take, for example, how the ideas of intersectionality have been watered down via the changing vocabulary applied to remedies for racial and gender injustice. Universities exercise cosmetic change, the attention to the mantra of diversity, equity, and inclusion, while avoiding any substantive institutional change. In other words, intersectionality is increasingly being recast as a discourse that helps in institutional carework, and the emotional labor that this entails, rather than as a field of study in its own right. Its use shifts from being analytical and critical to providing service. This was one of my main concerns in *IACST*, namely, how intersectionality can sharpen its analytical and critical possibilities in the context of a seemingly inclusive academy.

Flavia Matheus Rios: *Has the Latin American feminist thought been, in any extent, relevant for (or considered by) Black feminist thought in the US? Have you had any contact with the ideas of Black Latin American feminists?*

Patricia Hill Collins: My contacts with Black Latin American feminism are indirect, refracted through Chicana feminism, Puerto Rican feminism, Cuban-American feminism, and feminisms of Latinas in the US with distinctive ties to Latin America. These cross-border ties, and in the case of Puerto Rican women, internal colonial

relations, have been essential to the growth of ‘women of color’ feminism in the US as well as intersectionality. In intellectual work, there is a recognition that Latinas, Black women, and Afro Latinas, who by one count are 25 percent of Latinas in the US, bring distinctive perspectives to intersectional projects that stem from varying experiences with colonialism, slavery, indigeneity, and migration. Dialogues among women of color that are informed by Latina intellectuals and activists offer important perspectives on intersections of gender, sexuality, religion, and citizenship. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa’s work on borderland thinking and *mestiza* consciousness has provided a philosophical anchor for women of color feminism in the US (Anzaldúa, 1987). But this is not enough. Learning more about the specific feminisms within national countries in Latin America and how those feminisms influenced one another is essential.

Quite frankly, I wish I knew more about the relationship between Latin American feminist thought and US Black feminist thought. Black feminism is a collaborative, evolving project. These ties are there, but we need sustained, serious empirical work on the interconnections among variations of feminism. Because each of us is limited by what we know and can do, we have to rely on one another to provide missing pieces for our own questions. You do what you can, and then hope that others will help you. This is the collaborative promise of intersectionality. Recognizing that we each have partial perspectives on domination and resistance, rather than continuing to frame our questions through Western intellectual centers such as Western philosophy, marginalized groups should seek each other out to learn from each other.

Marcos Nobre: *I would be grateful if you could elaborate on the constellation of the notions of domination, resistance, and emancipation. I formulated my doubts on this matter in two intertwined questions. If I understood you correctly, the main normative point of the intersectional approach of your most recent book is that of “resistance”, which seems to me to be the notion that gives meaning to the “critical” that one can find in your project of a “critical social theory”. The first question would then be: is there a single conceptual counterpart for “resistance”, or many? And in the same direction, my second question is: what does one resist to? Domination? Capitalism?*

Patricia Hill Collins: I really appreciate this question because it goes to the heart of which terms best carry the substance of my arguments. I have argued with myself about each individual term as well as the connections among them. Examining the connections between resistance and intellectual work lies at the heart of my scholarship (see, e.g., *On intellectual activism*, Collins, 2012). But understanding how



I am conceptualizing resistance has been an ongoing concern for me. Resistance, both theorizing it and stimulating it, has been central to my scholarship. I need to know the specific ways that my conception of resistance informs my arguments about intersectionality as critical social theory. You ask, “would there be a single conceptual counterpart for ‘resistance,’ or many?” I am not yet sure, but I can say a bit about where I am now in thinking through resistance. Here, your two follow up questions are especially helpful. Let me take them in turn.

First, you ask, what is being resisted? The core task of *IACST* lay in engaging this question of resistance to what and the centrality of ideas to that resistance. For some time, I have aimed to craft a sense of political action that resides neither in the terrain of theory nor of practice. In other words, political resistance is more than ideas but is dependent on ideas. Intersectionality deepens understanding of resisting existing social injustices by how systems of power work. Capitalism, racism, colonialism, heteropatriarchy, nationalism, and similar systems of power can all be seen as systems of unjust power relations. The common feature here is that these are all systems whereby domination takes specific form both within each system as well as through their intersections. For example, domination can occur through intimate interpersonal relations, or it can animate large-scale warfare. Social injustices can be seen in everyday life, within groups, through the ways that organizations are constructed, the policies of social institutions as well as the discourses that defend these arrangements.

But conceptualizing resistance in this way continues to center analysis on oppression but not on resistance. One dimension of hegemonic power is that it routinely sets the terms of all debate, including the meaning of resistance. But what if we turned this relationship on its head? Perhaps we get the kind of social order and domination that we do now, not as a reflection of elite actions, but rather as the sedimented resistance to past domination. Ideas would be especially important in this view of resistance that normalizes resistance as part of everyday life. Specific resistance strategies are part of an ongoing, lifelong socialization that refuses to capitulate to the normality of oppression. I recognize the daunting nature of how intersecting power relations oppress, as well as the myriad ways that domination is organized from micro to macro levels of society. But I refuse to theorize power in such a way that it cannot be resisted or to theorize resistance in such a way that it is derivative of power. Because I reject the unstated assumption that has informed so much critical social theory that oppression is inevitable, my approach to conceptualizing resistance is not nihilistic. I become part of the problem if I produce critical social theory that has no implications for resistance in it. Stated differently, theorizing resistance not only animates my social theorizing as a goal, thinking about the

implications of my theorizing for praxis (resistance) also serves as a methodological check on my own process.

The second question is more difficult, because it requires both analysis and imagination. It is far easier to analyze what resistance is against than to imagine what resistance is for. What lies beyond resistance? How do you know when resistance is successful? Is resistance aiming for some higher goal that is theoretically possible yet politically impractical, e.g., emancipation, social justice, freedom? How will the world look different if resistance and the domination that it engenders, are not central to human behavior? Is this possible?

These may be broad existential questions, but they have had practical implications in that I knew that I could not dwell on theorizing resistance if I had a hope of finishing *LACST*. But this question of resistance remained as I finished the book, but I knew that I could not answer then. Now that *LACST* has been published, I hope to have a better sense of how to deepen the theme of resistance that you quite rightly point out is a core organizing principle of *LACST* as well as the corpus of my work to date. I still have no definitive answers, but I can share some intriguing scholarly directions concerning how people imagine freedom from domination. Analyzes of resistance where thinkers aim to step outside Western social theory in order to imagine new possibilities for knowledge/power relations are especially intriguing (see, e.g., *On decoloniality*, Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, or *Afrotopia*, Sarr, 2019). Let me briefly mention two. First, the renewed interest in speculative fiction, science fiction and Afrofuturism provide a fascinating glimpse of how Black intellectuals among others imagine life outside domination as a way of resisting it. This work plays with categories of time and space as a way both to criticize existing power relation and to imagine life beyond the here and now. Octavia E. Butler's novels anticipated contemporary concerns with resistance and freedom. Her classic work *Parable of the sower* not only provides a foundation for conceptualizing resistance but also offers an important genre for imaginative work (Butler, 1993).

Second, works by Indigenous scholars and activists across national settings provide by far the broadest and deepest literature for conceptualizing resistance. In addition to using a variety of strategies (fiction, memoir, analytical essay, historical studies, and social science analysis), the attentiveness to Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies is invaluable. I wish that I had had access to this literature when I was writing *LACST*. In chapter 7, I offer one small story from an indigenous group in Canada as an entry point into the vast literatures and experiences of indigenous peoples who existed outside Western epistemologies. These narrative traditions identify a richly textured epistemology that has core recurring themes but that cannot be frozen into the tenets of a dead epistemology. I am glad that I was able to acknowledge

the epistemological boundaries of rethinking of resistance from within Western epistemologies in *LACST*. But that is not enough. I plan on following these three lines of investigation as a way to sharpen my conception of resistance.

Nadya Araujo Guimarães: *Are the key “core constructs” you develop in the book (relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice) a specific contribution coming from the intersectionality paradigm? How contemporary and classic social theory dialogue on this? Have you observed any process of cross-fertilization?*

*I have to confess that, at the time I was thinking about this question, my memories moved toward an interesting discovery I made last year, once I was tracing the impact in the US academy of a preeminent white Brazilian feminist, Heleieth Saffioti. In the late 1960s Saffioti wrote a book (*A mulher na sociedade de classes*), originally a thesis, which was seminal for the Brazilian Sociology (Saffioti, 1969). In this book she anticipated the argument of the multiple dimensions of power oppression, as simultaneously based on class, race and gender relations (of course, the word gender was not there!). Less than 10 years from its first Brazilian edition, in 1978, the book was published in English by the Monthly Review Press (Saffioti, 1978), with an introduction of Eleanor Leacock, a very known Marxist anthropologist, a white woman, very sensitive to the academic and political issues raised by feminist movement. While tracing the marks of the reception of Saffioti's ideas outside Brazil, it was a pleasure to realize that as the book came out in its English version, some interesting reviews appeared in relevant international journals. Nevertheless, I stumbled upon an unexpected book review, published in the American Journal of Sociology (AJS) much latter, in 2014, about twenty years after its English edition (Celarent, 2014). What a surprise! As all other Saffioti's reviewers, this one was also signed by a woman, Barbara Celarent, an author whose existence in the field of gender studies was unknown to me. To my surprise, a few months later, I discovered that this woman never existed. The real author was Andrew Abbott, a preeminent professor at the University of Chicago Sociology Department and former editor of AJS. From 2009 to 2015 he published thirty-five reviews stressing the relevance of some books, many of them (as Heleieth's) barely unknown (or maybe forgotten by) the contemporary global debate. Under the pseudonym of Barbara Celarent – a “Professor of Particularity at the University of Atlantis” as she is referred by the AJS (both, field and institution obviously inexistent), Abbott argued that it was time to force the debate on social theory to turn less Western than it has been, so we could reach a real global social theory (Abbott, 2016).*

*Thus, when you referred to “particularities” 10 minutes ago, my memories flew toward Abbott's enterprise, and I find myself thinking again on why did he need to use a pseudonym. Besides, why Barbara Celarent, as a character, has been conceived as she*

*was? And over all why this large set of reviews only called the academic attention once published as a whole, in a book, co-signed/edited with a man, Andrew Abbott (Celarent & Abbott, 2016)? Why no one picked it up?!*

*This allows me to return to my point: in your new book, you are also dealing with a set of concepts which are crucial to the Western social theory; and you are also trying to rephrase, to integrate, to pack them as “core” categories for your perspective. Could you reflect a little more on this?*

Patricia Hill Collins: I thought you were going to ask me something else, but now that you have described how Andrew Abbott – a prominent white male social theorist, published reviews of books that he wished to see reviewed in *AJS*, but that he himself wrote under pseudonym – I want to think about this case. I am speculating here (and I base my thoughts solely on your rendition of this case) what I know about *AJS*, a premier journal within American sociology that has had important influence on the field, as well as my working knowledge of Andrew Abbott’s scholarship. I taught Abbott’s book *Chaos of disciplines* (Abbott, 2010) in my graduate social theory course and found his book *Methods of discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences* (Abbott, 2004) useful for my argument about the heuristic use of intersectionality (see, *LACST*, chapter 1). Yet how do I make sense of the creation of Abbott/Celarent, a gendered hybrid identity whereby Abbott and Celarent exchange places as frontstage and backstage social actors?

A charitable read of Abbott/Celarent’s motives suggests that s/he quite rightly perceived that s/he could not find reviewers for texts such as Saffioti’s *Woman in class society* who were sufficiently qualified to meet his/her standards for rigorous *AJS* reviews. Perhaps s/he imagined that s/he was supporting scholars who were not-white, not-male, not-Western and not-privileged by promoting their books, through the anonymous backing of a powerful patron such as himself. Under this gendered scenario, Abbott can feel morally self-righteous, politically protected from criticism because he didn’t write the reviews, she did, while having a bit of fun through Celarent’s antics. However well-meaning that Abbott/Celarent may have been, this case provides a pristine example of how journal editors, funders and other gatekeepers can play inordinate behind the scene roles in shaping what counts as legitimate sociology.

Yet a less sanguine read of this pseudonym situation casts it as the worst kind of affirmative action, one that assumes that marginalized groups who do make it to the academy are less qualified, and therefore can only succeed if they form alliances with more powerful allies, typically prominent, senior, elite white men. As I discuss in “Intersectionality and epistemic resistance” (*LACST*, chapter 4), the chal-

lenge of building interpretive communities across differences of power *within* the academy, in this case, access to social theory, has epistemological dimensions that structure power relations. Abbot had choices other than becoming a ventriloquist manipulating an imagined Celarent dummy who spoke for him without assuming responsibility for his arguments – in this interview, I have to assume responsibility for my ideas because I am visible – or even to speak at all. For example, I wonder why Abbott failed to use the power of his position as editor of *AJS* to recruit and expand the pool of reviewers for the books that Celarent evaluated? This kind of anonymous manipulation of the rules themselves, even if done in the name of promoting “new” ideas, is controlled by elites who fundamentally massage the processes of knowledge-creation without being named as social actors. Contrast the editorial behavior of Abbott/Celarent with that of my colleague Margaret Andersen when she was editor of *Gender and Society*. Like Abbott/Celarent, she recognized the significance of new work by women, people of color and global gender scholars, and she aggressively recruited junior scholars to submit papers for a special edition on “Race, class, and gender”. Many of them would not have done so without a “call for papers” that they perceived as welcoming. The number of papers that arrived far exceeded the capacity of one special issue. Andersen’s decision has shaped the contours of that journal ever since. Abbot’s private joke of writing under a pseudonym that preserved his anonymity leaves a dubious legacy for sociological engagement and for *AJS*. In contrast, Andersen’s public position of supporting race, class and gender scholarship helped cultivate an interpretive community of race, class, gender scholars whose work continues to have a major impact on the field.

I remain committed to developing dialogues between scholars of contemporary social theory, classical social theory, and critical social theory. Yet stories such as the Abbott/Celarent case make me wary of how realistic processes of cross-fertilization can be if they fail to pay serious attention to the politics of knowledge construction within social theory writ large. My chapter on “Intersectionality and resistant knowledge projects” aims to broaden the framework of who produces new ideas and how they might emerge from resistance (*LACST*, chapter 3). How can resistant knowledge projects such as Black feminism be effective if they remain entangled in structures of knowledge legitimation such as those suggested by the Abbott/Celarent case? At least we know about this one. But, when it comes to intersectionality, how many backstage, anonymous actions aim to sabotage this resistant knowledge project, all the while claiming to uphold its core principles?

This brings me to the other part of your question. In what ways, if any, can these core principles of relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice that I propose work as a basic vocabulary for dialogue? Do they

help in cross-fertilization, or do they obscure the tough issues because this seemingly shared language suggests that we understand these terms in the same way? I settled on these terms precisely because they are *both* familiar within classical, contemporary, and critical social theory *and* also travel across and beyond these venues. Significantly, social actors in non-academic venues also carry other understandings of these terms, sometimes in layperson's language as well as meanings offered by the specialty language of practitioners.

I recognize the limitations of using these concepts, but I also recognize the core theoretical challenge of how to make our ideas clear when we use them. Ideas may be perfectly clear in your own mind or in conversations among a group of like-minded individuals. But conversations across differences of power such as those of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and citizenship typically reveal the limitations of our own seemingly self-evident explanations of the social world. To me, the meaning of each concept is always under construction through dialogue (see, e.g., my earlier comments about intersectionality as a methodology). Social theory offers a provisional understanding of a concept, but the meaning of a concept lies in its use. One caveat – the kinds of dialogues that yield the strongest critical thinking are rarely conflict free.

In writing *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, I had a series of imaginary conversations with the fields most prominent in advancing a particular concept. For example, many of intersectionality's practitioners are committed to social justice, a concept with a broad literature within human rights and civil rights law as well as philosophy. There is no one settled definition of social justice. Significantly, many intersectional practitioners assume that others share their often idiosyncratic definitions of social justice and are equally committed to it. But as I discuss in "Intersectionality without social justice?" (*LACST*, chapter 8), any understanding of social justice for intersectionality must be constructed and not assumed. Relationality as a concept carries a similar challenge of its growing popularity within Western fields of study. But is relationality increasingly becoming a placeholder term that fosters style without substance? Is it doomed to be drained of its critical potential? The chapter "Relationality within intersectionality" (*LACST*, chapter 7) was one of the most difficult for me to write, because the term relationality is so widely used both inside and outside intersectionality.

Antonio Sergio Alfredo Guimãaes: *The mestizo in Latin America was imagined by our intellectual elites as a fusion of three races, a meta-race that would finally surpass the colonial categories of racial subordination and the myth of white superiority. We have seen this construction lately rejected by Black Brazilian intellectuals – such as*



*Guerreiro Ramos, Abdias do Nascimento, Lélia Gonzalez, and others – because they realized mestizaje was a way of obscuring the existent racism against Blacks and African descendants. Recently, anthropologists such as Kelly Luciani (2016) have demonstrated the existence of an anti-mestizo stance among the subaltern racialized mestizos: far from imagining themselves as a fusion, these mestizos believe they have different races within themselves, which enables them to transit across different racial worlds.*

*And today in Brazil there is a discussion of who can benefit from the quotas, there is an argument that people are frauding the process, and there is another argument that says no, some of them are sincere, they can probably believe they merit the quota because they also suffered some kind of discrimination. How do you see the unfolding of this process? In the US differently, you have an idea of passing which is always fraudulent. But here sometimes people think there is some room for moving between categories. You remember Carl Degler (1971) when he wrote on Brazil, he said Brazilian's mulato was absorbed by the dominant and white classes, and that Blacks were lacking of leadership in Brazil was because of mestizo's cooptation.*

*My question is then: How do these two imagined mestizaje affect your way of thinking about race in Latin America?*

Patricia Hill Collins: I have a working knowledge of *mestizaje* in Latin America, but I am not an expert. Given this, the best way that I can approach your question is to extrapolate from US race relations for points of contact and divergence between Brazil and the US. Both systems have tried to reconcile the flaws in their democracies by explaining intersections of racism and nationalism in their understandings of national identity. In Brazil, *mestizaje* offers an imagined national identity whereby loyalty to the Brazilian nation minimizes if not erases racial differences. This philosophy of racial democracy erases racism by ignoring the reality of racial hierarchy. As you point out, this meta-race – that ostensibly moved beyond the colonial categories of racial subordination and the myth of white superiority – was incorporated into racial democracy and its need for the construct of *mestizaje*. In contrast, imagined national identity in the US collapses national identity with whiteness, a form of ethnic nationalism. This ethnic nationalism influences the official policies of racial integration and multiculturalism whereby US democracy aims for inclusion.

Black people in the Brazil and US have criticized how these respective versions of national identity uphold white supremacy. For Brazil, the organizational challenge was to create consciousness among Black subjects that their Blackness or race was fundamental to their social status and treatment. Anti-Black racism seemingly did not exist in Brazil because the erasure of Blackness by the construct of *mestizaje* also erased a language for criticizing racial inequalities in jobs, housing, education,

and health. Black people in the US confronted a racial apartheid version of racism that was grounded in strict separation of races, using biological criteria such as the “one drop rule”. This system grudgingly gave way to a vision of multiculturalism, one whereby when the barriers to African American assimilation were removed, Black people would be free to contribute to a multicultural America. In essence, the goal of multiculturalism was to become a melting pot that was a pathway to colorblind society. Ironically, this multicultural melting pot resembled Brazil’s *mestizaje*. Both offer an idealized form of racial democracy that rests on a colorblind racism that produce important racial disparities yet that do not rely on official racial categories to do so.

This second imagined understanding of *mestizaje* is a bit more difficult for me to unpack. You identify “subaltern racialized *mestizos*” as advancing an “anti-*mestizo* stance ... which enables them to transit across different racial worlds”. Believing that they have different races within themselves, they reject the notion of fusion, e.g., melting-pot concept of *mestizaje* in favor of a multi-cultural understanding of *mestizaje*. Who are these people and where do they fit within Brazil’s racial history? The term “subaltern” can obscure more than it reveals. When plucked from its Indian context of a finely tuned, intergenerational caste system, I wonder which ideas travel and which don’t in relation to the Brazilian context? What are the ties of this segment of “racialized *mestizos*”? The US counterpart would be biracial or mixed-race individuals who only recently have organized as mixed-race people. This group finds itself in-between white and black, a liminal space that does make sense in the context of US racial history. Because I remain unsure about the details of this group for Brazil, I will reserve comment for a future conversation.

To me, these debates speak to the complexities of trying to remedy the ongoing effects of systemic racism that replicate disadvantage without anyone taking responsibility for doing so now. This is the beauty of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) construct of “racism without racists”, namely, a system of colorblind racism where Black people can be hyper visible as subjects, yet where the structural dimensions of how social institutions reproduce white privilege and black disadvantage remain invisible to white people. Imperfect public policies aim to redress past harms and their continuing effects, yet they have an uphill battle in the face of well-meaning white people who simply refuse to believe that racism is real. Affirmative action is one policy among many that aims to redress past wrongs. “Subaltern racialized *mestizos*” and “mixed race individuals” will certainly be part of this effort to redress racism. But can they offer the kind of leadership around these issues in this new era of racial conflict? Certainly not by themselves. They will need allies. But the moment for a new leadership class of people who see themselves as able to negotiate

the often-competing demands of racially disparate groups may have passed. In the midst of an ongoing Black Lives Matter Movement, we will just have to wait and see.

Edna Roland: *I wonder if you have had any contact with the African feminism?*

Patricia Hill Collins: Not as much as I would like. I certainly have had substantive conversations with individual African feminists, but I have not systematically studied African feminism. Because the term itself is so broad, it is important for build an African feminism that speaks to the needs of women in continental Africa. My sense is that African feminists are working within specific national contexts that in turn put them in a position for dialogues that address the specific needs of women within and among the 54 sovereign African countries of continental Africa. I include a provisional discussion of African feminism in *BFT* (1990) that reflects the concerns of African feminists to analyze Western gender discourse. Those debates have only deepened and have been expanded to encompass broader questions of decoloniality. Ugandan sociologist Sylvia Tamale's (2020) book on *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* breaks new ground in this regard within African feminism. Broadening this lens to encompass women in the African Diaspora and their relations with Black feminism adds additional layers of complexity and possibility.

My focus over the past several years has been Black feminism in Brazil, an important site of African Diasporic Feminism that, because it does not originate in the US offers important anchor for Black Diasporic feminism. Brazil provides an important touchstone between African feminism and Black feminism in the US. For me, Black feminism in Brazil is a project that has an energy that draws from its African heritage but reflects the necessity of resisting oppression. As long as the needs of Black women in Brazil remain unmet, the need for Black feminism will persist. I have been fortunate enough to spend time with an amazing array of Black women in Brazil who unapologetically claim blackness and feminism. Moreover, the scope of Black feminism to reach across boundaries of higher education, public policy, the arts, and grassroots activism is impressive. There is an intellectual synergy and energy here that is lacking in the US. This is kind of commitment that I alluded to earlier, and it is deeply organized across venues but also among generations. As long as the needs of Black women in Brazil remain unmet, the need for Black feminism will persist.

When it comes to my direct ties with African feminism, I have continued to try to learn as much as I could through published work by African feminists, but I would not say that I have cultivated the kind of social network with African feminists as I have been able to do here in Brazil. But I am working on it.

Edna Roland: *Some information in Angola, of very young feminists' women, very interesting how they are discussing issues of patriarchy there, it's very very interesting, the questions they are raising, the situation of women...*

Patricia Hill Collins: I appreciate your comments about young women and feminist activism in continental Africa. To be frank, my focus on Brazil has heightened my awareness of African feminism, especially in the Portuguese diaspora. In November 2018, I attended the international meeting on women and feminism (Nós Tantas Outras) that was organized by SESC São Paulo. It was refreshing to attend an event in the Global South that was organized by and that occurred outside US feminist venues. Instead of meeting on a university campus or at an upscale hotel, our sessions were held at various SESC locations. We spent considerable time in the van, travelling to conference venues and discussing our respective projects in the arts, activism, the academy, and public policy. I was especially intrigued by my informal conversations with women who had travelled from Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. The growth of feminism among young women was not a featured theme on the conference agenda, but it stimulated some fascinating van talk and informal conversation. Many of the attendees described the emergence of feminism among young women and the different ways that young women were finding to frame this feminist message across quite different cultures. For example, one woman presented how young women in China protested against street harassment not through marches, petitions, and demonstrations, but through the creative use of silent street theater. Without using words, they communicated a message that condemned street harassment in ways that made it difficult for officials to suppress. In our conversations, we shared how girls and young women are coming up with creative responses to the things that are affecting their lives. We all needed to hear from one another. I am so grateful that I was able to attend that meeting and I thank you for your invitation to this interview.

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